

By Pat Haggerty

Now that Advent is upon us, we can settle down to the business of preparation. I mean real preparation! I am not talking about the shopping, the baking, the decorating, the lists of things to do or the parties that one must plan for. I am talking about that inner preparation, that deep reflection, that transformation that leads to preparing one's heart for the welcoming of the Christ Child.

Sometimes we can find wisdom in the strangest places. There is a line from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* th at says it all: "Maybe Christmas," he thought, "doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas. . .perhaps. . .means a little bit more!"

Yes, it does mean A LOT MORE! The meaning of Christmas has been pondered for countless generations. What do you think of when you are trying to reflect on Christmas? What do you think of when you are trying to prepare for Christmas?

I may have a strategy that will help you out. I was reviewing the readings for the four Sundays in Advent. I came up with four key words taken from those readings. They are the following: **w atch**
,
prepare
,

rejoice
and
sing.
The final words of Mark's gospel for the First Sunday in Advent are: "I say to all, Watch!" That can't be much clearer. Mark wants us to watch for when the Lord is coming. We have to be constantly ready.

In his gospel for the Second Sunday of Advent, Mark says, "Prepare the way of the Lord." What does our preparation entail? What should we be doing? Can we prepare the way for Him by helping others? By seeking peace? By living out a spirit of justice?

As the Third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday, it is fitting that the word for that Sunday is rejoice. In the first reading, we hear from the Prophet Isaiah. He is telling us: "I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul." That message is reinforced in the responsorial psalm as well. We should rejoice in the Lord at all times---especially on this day and during this season. As Christians, we praise God through our living and through our praying. Do both well!

Finally, the word for the Fourth Sunday of Advent is sing. During this Sunday, we hear about Mary's "yes" to the announcement by the angel Gabriel. We utter in the responsorial psalm our own affirmation of praise: "Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord." (Psalm 89) Let us sing to Emmanuel, let us sing our own exclamation of yes!

So, in the weeks ahead, think of the message from the Grinch. Go one step further and---watch, prepare, rejoice and sing!